

Interview with Gertrude Downs
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Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Introduction

Mrs. Downs is a former post master for the town of Buellton from Feb. 1945 to April 1963, a total of 18 years.

Mrs. Downs you were telling me about the little store that became the Buellton Post Office. Was it a grocery store?

Mrs. D: Yes, It was a grocery store on the south west corner of Hwy 246 and Ave. of Flags, Buellton. Mr. Bodine came to this area and started this store. Then Mr. Budd became his partner. Mr. Budd had a store on the north east corner of that same intersection, but when they became partners, Mr. Budd sold out his store. He had had the post office in his store since 1920. The Budd store location is now Andersen's Pea Soup Restaurant.

PL: When did Buellton become an official post office town?

Mrs. D: It was in 1920. The people of the town had petitioned for the name, Buell, but there was a town by that name in Oregon, so they proposed Buellton.

PL: Is there a lot of paper work involved when a town asks for a U.S. Post Office?

Mrs. D: I don't know about that as when I came on to work that had already been done.

PL: How long was Mr. Budd the Post Master?

Mrs. D: He started in December 1920 to January 1945. He had to retire at the age of 70. Then I came in and was the second Post Master.

PL: And you served for how long?

Mrs. D: 18 years, until April 1963. Me. Leonard Enger was next and at the present the Post Master is Einalee Daly.

PL: Is it more difficult for a woman to become Post Master?

Mrs. D: No. They have to take the same examination and have to be recommended by members of the community.

PL: You had to be recommended?

Mrs. D: Yes, I had been working for Mr. Budd for a few months. Different members of the community and the U.S. congressman recommended me in 1945.

PL: Did any one else apply when you did?

Mrs. D: No.

PL: Do you remember what your salary was?

Mrs. D: I don't remember about that. I did get my school teacher's salary and the post office salary mixed up.

PL: So you had been a school teacher as well.

Mrs. D: Yes, I taught in San Gabriel and in Maricopa. I taught only four years and began in 1919.

PL: 1919 is the same year that Evelyn Merrill Buell came here to teach.

Mrs. D: Yes, we graduated from L.A. Normal the same year. I did not know her at that time because there were so many people. That was the year that school became a

university.

PL: You started to teach in San Gabriel?

Mrs. G: Yes, for two years and then I went to Maricopa. Elementary level, all grades in San Gabriel and two years in Maricopa, 6th and 7th grade.

PL: What brought you to Buellton?

Mrs. G: We were living in Patterson, Calif. when my husband's nephew, Earnest Mankins asked us down here to work on the Doheny Ranch. The Doheny Ranch is where the Santa Ynez Valley Air Port is now.

PL: How did you meet your husband?

Mrs. D: We met through a friend, he came out to visit a friend of mine in Maricota, Carriso Plains.

PL: Can you give me the history of the Buellton Post Office?

Mrs. D: The first post office was established in Dec. 1920 with William Budd as post master. Prior to that Buellton had not officially been placed on the map so residents received their mail in Solvang by way of Gaviota. Mr. Budd conceived the name Buell, but because of complications the name became Buellton. They chose that name in honor of the founder and owner of the Rancho San Carlos de Jonata, Rufus Thompson Buell. In 1921 Mr. A.G. Bodine and his family moved to Buellton and the two men, Budd and Bodin went together in a store and the post office went there. The present location of that store is now Parkway Market. Mr.

Bodine became assistant post master. The office grew over the next 20 years and it was raised to Third Class. In Dec. 1941 Mr. Budd dissolved that partnership and moved the post office to a small frame building on Hwy 246 where the car wash is at present, and it stayed there until 1956 when the post office was moved to the corner of Central and Hwy. 246, now called High Oaks Feed Store. The post office was located in a hardware store owned by Mr. Weston, and he also had a barber shop.

PL: Would you explain what Thrd Class means?

Mrs. D: When the gross receipts go over a certain ammount, then the post office moved to another designation. It must be a first class by now.

PL: When did the mail start being delivered to homes?

Mrs. D: A rural route was started in 1961 for the people living on Hwy. 246 from Hwy. 101 to Everts Rainbow Ranch now Rolling Hills Nursery, which was only about a half mile. And the housing tract of Thumbeline also go mail delivered. If you wanted delivery you had to make application and put up your box on the street. The men brought the mail from Lompoc along Hwy. 246. He sorted the mail and then took the letters out in his car. We had a highway post office that started in 1960 coming and delivering mail to Buellton from the Santa Ynez Valley and Lompoc. They went to all the post offices in the valley. That was a Star Route from Santa Maria.

There was a Star Route from Lompoc where he sorted the mail before started out from Lompoc and would go back by way of Santa Rosa Road. Of course we had to sort the mail here and put it in the boxes.

PL: Did you work on Saturdays?

Mrs. D: Yes, a half day.

PL: Did you enjoy your time at the post office?

Mrs. D: Yes, better than teaching.

PL: Were there other women post masters when you were one?

Mrs. D: Yes, in Santa Ynez, Ruth Pratt. In Los Olivos Nellie Stonebarger was post master. The inspectors came and gave you your rating and it did not matter if you were a man or woman. Later on I became ill and so I retired at 65 in 1963.

PL: Thank you Mrs. Downs for this interview.